

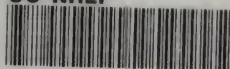
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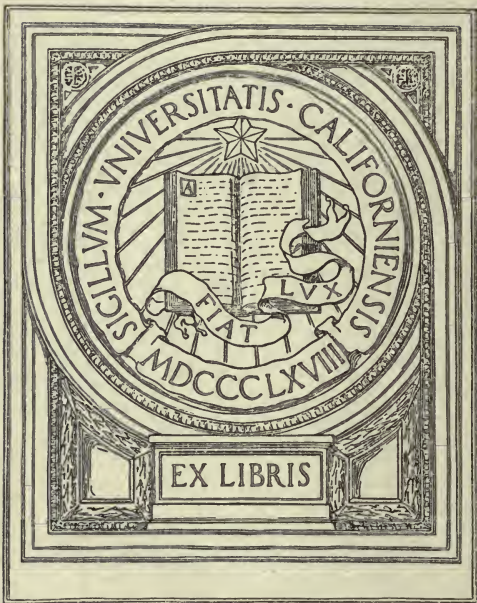
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The Founder of Polish independence

JOSEPH PILSUDSKI

by

St. J. BONCZA

LONDON AND EDINBURGH
SAMPSON LOW, MORSTON & Co., Ltd.
1921.



JOSEPH PIŁSUDSKI

Founder of Polish National Independence and
Chief of the Polish State

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I.

THE YOUTH AND THE ACTIONS OF PILSUDSKI UNTIL THE OUTBREAK OF THE GREAT WAR.

Like Kosciuszko and Mickiewicz, Pilsudski was born in Lithuania, the country that as early as the XIVth century joined Poland in a voluntary union when threatened by Teutonic invasions. Poland and Lithuania together formed one State, which was later on looked upon by both nations as their fatherland.

The parents of Pilsudski belonged to the gentry of Poland, White-Ruthenia and Lithuania, that gentry which had for centuries protected these three nations from the invasions constantly threatening from East and West. In the family estate of Zulov, not far from Vilno, the future Commander in Chief and Chief of the Polish State first saw the light. He was born soon after the national insurrection in which the whole family took an active part. The child, brought up by his mother—a woman of unusual generosity and elevation of character—in traditions of family and national events, and taught

to respect those engaged in simple physical labour, passed his early years under the influence of government terror menacing on all sides and under the elevating home influence, that inspired him with courage and a never failing faith for the future.

Leaving home for a Russian school, the soul of the little lad was already deeply imbued with the sentiments of a future champion of freedom. His school life, during which he had to endure in silence all the worries and torments to which the government system subjected the boys, in order to efficaciously root out all that was Polish, only served to harden the character of the coming conspirator. Expelled later, when a student, from Charkov University for participation in student disorders, he entered the Polish Revolutionary Circle, a society tinged with Socialism.

The following fact is most characteristic of the views of Pilsudski at this time: when in 1887 the delegate of a Russian revolutionary organisation arrived in Vilno from Petersburg and proposed to the Circle to participate in an attempt on the life of Alexander III, Pilsudski opposed him. "The revolutionary duty of the Poles", he asserted, "is to struggle against Russian oppression as it is, but not to fight for changes in the form of the government in Russia, the result of which, as far as the Poles are concerned, is doubtful". "As a Socialist I am averse to terror", he stated at the same time.

Being tried later on as an alleged complice in the above attempt, Pilsudski was condemned to 5 years exile in Eastern Siberia.

One of his letters written to his father at that time, reflects the social political views of the twenty years old youth.

It contains first and foremost the intense regret of a born man of action, who complains, not of his punishment, but that

it is brought about solely by fatal chance and not by any real action of his own.

It contains further the social creed of the writer: "I wish every man to see a brother in his neighbour, that all should have the right to this world's goods, and that, unburdened from toil, they could strive for the happiness of humanity".

We have here also a sketch of the mode of action of the coming organizer and creator of the State: "We shall accomplish nothing, if we only have the fulfilment of our own ideas in view and try to force our will on others". "One should go with deliberation perseveringly towards the end in view, following the stream of life and not the calling of noble but empty dreams".

This exile became for Pilsudski a new school of political thought.

"I had now the possibility of becoming acquainted with the character of the Russian nation, to look into the very depths of its soul, to understand the spirit of Russian history". "All Russians", Pilsudski was wont to assert, "are more or less disguised Imperialists, not excepting the Revolutionaries. Elementary centralism is the characteristic of these people who eternally sigh for the absolute. They are unable to reconcile opposites, they reject completely even the needs of conscious social organisation, in order merely not to be compelled to think of them. Let everything be done by itself, in an elementary manner. That is the cause of the many Anarchists among them. It is an extraordinary thing however, that I never met any Republicans at all among the Russians".

After his return from exile in 1892 Pilsudski joined one of the secret political groups in the country, which then had not yet created any organisation. Owing to his very energetic and prominent assistance the Polish Socialist Party (P. P.

S.) was formed in the same year. It took as the political aim of its minimum programme: "The Independence of Poland".

Later, we see Pilsudski as editor and printer of the secret paper of this party. From the columns of his "Robotnik" (Workman) Pilsudski urged independence as the necessary and real aim in view and spoke of the necessity of preparing for an armed struggle to attain this end. As this took place during the period of the most terrible Russian repression and the complete resignation and crushing of the Polish public, the voice of Pilsudski, according to the just expression of the contemporary writer Sieroszewski, rang like a bell amidst the darkness and deafness of the night. "Some one is watching" said Poland with a mysterious thrill. Pilsudski aroused the soul of his nation and taught it afresh its already forgotten idea of the sacrifices of blood for national independence. Appealing to the most numerous of the social classes, the most defenceless in suffering — he said to them: "We wish for an independent Poland in order to organize for her a better life and one just towards all alike". Distributing his secret papers himself, Pilsudski visited in turn the different organisations, forming new ones from the working and educated classes and from Polish youth; investigating relations; becoming acquainted with the whole country, its needs and its defects. After awaking the country the turn came for public manifestation. This took place on the celebration of the workmen's holiday, the first of May, strictly forbidden by the Imperial Police. During this manifestation there was an encounter with the police. The young working men began to clamour for arms. This was the result so desired by Pilsudski. Educating in this manner and selecting persons for his ends, he was always directed by an unequalled intuition and penetration. He sought not only for capacity and intuition, but for character and conscience. He

built up the future on the spiritual and moral worth of the individual and of the nation. At the beginning of 1900 the Imperial authorities discovered the printing press of the "Robotnik" in Lodz in Pilsudski's private apartment and arrested him. He was sent first to the 10th Pavilion in the Warsaw Citadel and was there committed for trial. It is said that during the cross-questioning a colonel of gendarmes turned to Pilsudski and asked how he, the descendant of an ancient noble and hitherto wealthy family could be the leader of a party undermining the very foundations of private property and authority? Pilsudski is said to have replied: "In order to make this more comprehensible to you, I must remind you that when Russian princes mounted the horses over the necks of their boyars, my forefathers were already free citizens. How then can you expect me not to fight for freedom to-day?"

Transferred from the 10th Pavilion to the Petersburg hospital, Pilsudski was assisted to escape by his loyal friends and comrades. Once back in the country he decided at once to undertake preparations for the organisation of a national insurrection. In the face of the expected Russian-Japanese war his first care was to prevent a mobilisation, as he wished that the blood which was to be shed, should be rather shed in the struggle with Russia. But after investigating conditions in the country he was convinced that such an action could not then be successful, as the fear of Russian power was predominant. He then left for Japan in order to organize an insurrection in the rear of the Russian army, backed by the strength of Japan. He was however, baffled once again. The sole protest which he was able to call forth against mobilisation was the bloody demonstration of the workmen of the Polish Socialist Party on the Grzybowski Square in Warsaw. At the time when those elements which were opposed to insurrection got the

upper hand and showed a desire for common action with the Russian Revolutionaries, with a view to a change of government in Russia, Pilsudski was cut off from Warsaw by a railway strike, which was caused by these demonstrations. Thus he was enabled to hold himself aloof from all the prevailing unrest. Shortly after he formed the so-called "Fighting Organisation", collecting small detachments of volunteers and after drilling them in the use of arms, accustoming them to iron discipline, he equipped them and sent them, as the first partisans in the struggle for the freedom of Poland. The destruction of the greatest scoundrels among the Imperial police and gendarmes, the attacking of lesser detachments of the army, the breaking open of government safes — all formed part of the plans of this organization. Pilsudski saw that he would not be able to call a general insurrection by these means, but he wished to make a beginning, to bring about above all the first breach in the views of the Polish public, convincing it in this or in some other way, that a revolutionary struggle, understood as a struggle between Poland and Russia — was a possibility.

A proof of how highly each soldier of this "Fighting Organisation" understood the political and ideal character of these struggles, is the fact that when several of the soldiers were once seized for an attempt on the Russian authorities and were sentenced to be hanged they demanded that their sentence should be changed and that they should be shot, as they were not bandits but Polish soldiers fighting for the independence of their country. Their demand was granted. Even the Tsar's satraps realised the real character of Pilsudski's "Fighting Detachments".

When, at the weakening of the revolutionary movement in Russia the detachments were disbanded, Pilsudski's thoughts

turned in another direction. The conviction grew in him that from henceforth the aim of all efforts must be the formation of a regular national army.

In Cracow, where the persecution of Austrian authorities was least felt in comparison with that of the other annexed territories, Pilsudski created from two circles of young men desirous of receiving military instruction an "Rifle Club" later known as the: "Francs-Tireurs". This was a purely non-party military organisation. At the same time he gave an impulse to the organisation of propaganda amongst the public, taking the most active part in it himself, spreading the idea that it was impossible for Poland to merely talk and haggle over matters, but she must be regained by the assistance of her national army and by the active participation of every class of society.

In his at first secret, or at least semi-secret, action Pilsudski found a weak support in the public. He had to swim against the tide, "to fight with all Poland".

In 1910 carrying through the legalisation of the Rifle Club, he founded according to his own plan the Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers rifle schools and summer camp courses, sending instructors to found rifle ranges writing and expounding. The outbreak of the Balkan war, proving to everyone the possibility of an Austro-Russian war, was propitious, but when the danger of an immediate war was removed, the "Francs-Tireurs", at the head of which was Pilsudski, once more began to weaken and even in part fell into decay under the pressure of the secret and open adversaries to a war with Russia. Thus Pilsudski lived to see the outbreak of the universal war.

II.

THE PART PLAYED BY PILSUDSKI DURING THE GREAT WAR UNTIL THE LIBERATION OF POLAND FROM THE GERMAN YOKE.

The creation of the "Francs-Tireurs" as an organization in the service of Poland's independence, and as such directed first and foremost against Russia, was according to Pilsudski's views a necessity, without which the very idea of State-reconstruction would prove impossible.

Warsaw is the heart of Poland as Paris is the heart of France; it is not merely a symbol, but the centre of her real existence, and of her intellectual, political and economic life. A Polish state without Warsaw cannot be conceived.

The fact of having been divided between three usurping Powers, which in the nature of events were all hostile towards her, has been the tragedy of Poland.

Pilsudski, realizing the first necessity — a struggle with Russia, as the harbinger of a general struggle for independence, and the necessity of bringing about the evacuation of Warsaw by Russia, realized in a no less degree the danger threatening Poland from the side of Germany and Austria, and that it was essential for the existence of Poland that she should be able to defend herself against these countries. In accordance with this conception Pilsudski became the creator of a force, which was directed both against the former, as well as the two other powers. The "Francs-Tireurs", formed for the struggle with Russia, were unable to develop into an independent Polish Army owing to exterior and interior conditions, even after

having proved their character by the action of August 6-th, — i. e. the crossing of the boundary of the Congress Kingdom, as the first detachment of the Polish Army fighting for its own cause, — and became later part of the Legions. Not wishing to let go his hold on his trump card, the organized soldier, who could be made use of when he wished and in suitable conditions, Pilsudski consented to lead the Legions, in spite of incessant political friction and collisions between himself and the Central Powers. Together with his entrance into the Legions, on August 16th, 1916, that is to say at the same time as the Legions, Pilsudski began to organize on the territory of the Kingdom, a new secret military organization called the "Polish Military Organization" (P. O. W.). It existed at first in the rear of the Russian Army, and carried on propaganda in favour of a struggle for a Polish State, independent both of Russia and of the Central Powers. At the same time the organization carried on reconnoitring and destructive work against Russia, in the rear of her army, showing real assistance to the Legions fighting at the front. As the army of the Central Powers advanced deeper into the Kingdom, the "Polish Military Organization" ceased to reveal itself and worked in secret, in order to be able to use its strength against the new invaders when a favourable moment arrived.

At that time the Central Powers were victorious, at the zenith of their military triumph, and had laid their hands on nearly the whole of Poland.

The "Polish Military Organization" organized branches in all the country, even in the strictly guarded German Poland. At that time the Legions formed a fairly important fighting unit, tried in battle, and capable of being used as the germ of a stable army. General political conditions were such that the Central Powers, in spite of victories in the East,

and of Prussian terrorism applied in all its force against Poland, had to take into consideration the watchword of the Western Powers — selfdetermination of peoples, and that frontiers would have to be decided accordingly. For this reason, the Germans, who, though victorious in the East, were constantly being repulsed in the West, wished to palliate their annexationist aims with regard to Poland, and to comply with the demands of the Entente, were compelled to make a certain compromise towards Poland. Although this was done in a hypocritical and partial manner, they had to satisfy her evident desire for an independent life.

Pilsudski, who had previously put an end to recruiting for the Polish Legions, and distrusting the sincerity of German intentions, considered this moment propitious for creating from the already existing Legions a more numerous and independent military power, formed of Poles, and organized on the model of an army. With this object in view, he began negotiations with Austria, demanding: 1) the proclamation of the independence of the Polish State, 2) the possibility of creating an independent Polish Government, which also meant to say: a Polish Army, recruited from the Legions. Austria, not consenting to these demands, which she considered too far-reaching, agreed only to the extension of the Legion formations, and to the creation, from them, of a Polish Reinforcement Corps, making however certain concessions respecting Polish badges, uniforms, and independence of organization.

Pilsudski, not satisfied with this, then sent in his resignation. As a result of his position, Austria deprived him of freedom of movement, compelling him to live at Cracow.

The course of events removed the investigation of the Polish question, to Germany. In negotiations, carried on with both the Central Powers, Pilsudski repeated the same demands.

In reply, the Germans published the act of Polish independence, on July 5-th 1916, having decided to satisfy the claims of the Entente on this point. As far as the government and Army were concerned, the Central Powers did not wish to consent, realizing perfectly by experience, that Pilsudski was a man, who once having a certain strength in his hands, would use it against them. Desirous of insuring themselves against this, the Germans decided to form such a Polish Army, as would be subordinate to German Command and German officers. This would have been a parody of the Polish army, probably not a numerous one, but proclaiming to the world at large the joint action of the Poles and the Germans. In this manner the Germans would have settled the Polish question. In order to render any kind of counter-action from the side of Pilsudski impossible, the Germans decided to make dependent on themselves the one visible Polish force—the Legions. With this end in view, they had to take an oath, making them dependent on German chiefs. Pilsudski, the creator and symbol of the struggle for independence, recognized as such not only by the Legions, but by the already aroused public, was in this way to be pushed on one side, and his influence destroyed.

Pilsudski opposed this intention of subjecting the Legions to Germany with the whole of his moral influence, consenting rather to their complete disbandment. Knowing that the Germans were too powerful, and knowing that his strength at that time was still insufficient to enable him to carry on an open struggle, Pilsudski, having already at his disposal the secret organization, "The Polish Military Organization" (P. O. W.) spread over the entire territory of his political influence, prepared for a subterranean struggle with the German-Austrian invader. Pilsudski then passed to the realization of the second point of his programme, namely the struggle for liberation from the

German yoke, which had become the heaviest, and the most threatening to the independence of Poland. Russia was at that time not merely a defeated Power, but was also subject to a very powerful interior shock, which did not permit her acting energetically for the moment.

The Legions, under the influence of Pilsudski, refused the oath, and they were disbanded and interned; when the Germans realized the increasing moral influence of Pilsudski with the Polish public, he was arrested and imprisoned in the Magdeburg fortress. The Legionaries, in accordance with the device sent to them by Pilsudski, spread all over the country, in order to continue with renewed activity the development of the secret "Polish Military Organization", believing that the moment was approaching when the arms of heroic France, America and England would overcome the Central Powers, and that the Poles would be in a position to take up arms against them and drive them out of the country. We see from these events how very far-seeing was Pilsudski's policy, how well he knew the strength and conditions of Poland. Thus we see:

- 1) The knowledge, that the Great War was unavoidable, caused him to create the first armed Polish force, which he controlled to such a degree, that at the critical moment it became the interpreter of his intentions, aiming at the formation at any cost, and taking advantage of all possible conditions of an independent Polish State.

- 2) Already in 1914 Pilsudski created a secret military organization (P. O. W.), foreseeing the necessity of a struggle with the Central Powers, this organization in 1918 acted as a powerful military force, forcing back, with its mailed fist both occupying powers from the Polish frontiers, and inciting all classes of society to struggle. Finally, when Pilsudski, re-

mained interned in Magdeburg, the Polish public was animated by the one idea propagated by him: the necessity of an armed struggle with the Germans for independence.

In 1918, when after the outbreak of the revolution in Germany, Pilsudski returned to Warsaw, he was met and welcomed by all parties without exceptions as the man who, it was known and believed, would once more take up the work interrupted only by his term of imprisonment, the man who would drive out once and for ever the Germans and the Austrians, who would defend Poland against all her enemies, and would support her lasting independence.

III.

PILSUDSKI AS CHIEF OF THE POLISH STATE.

Arriving in Warsaw from Magdeburg Pilsudski found the country in a chaotic condition, all the more so, as new factors had come into play, such as the Russian Revolution. In order to centralize all social factors in Poland, and to lead them to the paths of indispensable united effort, to save all that had been attained by the Insurrection and also by the victory of the Entente over the Central Powers, taking into consideration currents arising from the deeply agitated tide of the Russian Revolution, Pilsudski assembled his first Government, whose members came from those of the social classes which had played a leading part in the insurrection, and which represented the masses. This Government, being the exponent of these social classes, was through force of events compelled to become

a Government to which the State from the very beginning of its existence assigned a democratic character.

One of the first State actions of this Government was the publishing of the franchise law and also the immediate summoning of the Legislative Diet. Pilsudski, submitting to the internal conditions of the State in this way, directed his chief efforts towards the creation of a regular and numerous Army to defend the frontiers of Poland, which were threatened on all sides. In most unusually difficult conditions, at a moment when the Galician Ukrainians were doing their best to capture Lemberg, when the Bolsheviks were not far from Warsaw, and when the revolted German army was to have marched through Poland from the East, threatening her with complete destruction, Pilsudski, with an unusually skillful policy parried a series of menacing blows, and created in such conditions and with merely the war material taken from the occupants at his disposal—a Polish army, which was immediately despatched to the threatened districts. The spirit of faith and sacrifice inspired by Pilsudski, together with his popularity with the wide masses of the population enabled the poorly equipped and insufficiently trained army to gain a victory. The problem of Russia and her internal organization was predominant in the entire Eastern policy, which was to decide first and foremost with regard to the existence of the Polish State. Pilsudski, who penetrated into the innermost depths of the Russian soul, as few have done, realized very clearly the relations and disposition of the social forces in Russia, and understood at the outset, that the solution of the Eastern problem would decide the whole question of Poland.

Although things went as far as the introduction of the authority of revolutionary factors into Russia, still the latter were no less prone than the former reactionary authorities to

the retention of former annexed territories by the State. These new ruling factors were imbued with a no weaker, but rather with a stronger desire for the renewal and strengthening of the Alliance with Germany.

Only the fact of the wrenching away from Russia, not of Poland alone, but of those nations which although hitherto passive tools, have yet helped to decide her victories, can ever deprive Russia of these tendencies, and divert the energy of her people towards an internal and civilizing work. The foremost of these nations is that of the fertile Ukraine, comprising many millions of inhabitants.

Pilsudski, following the voice of his ingenious intuition, created firstly a "fait accompli". By re-taking the Ukraine from the Bolsheviki he enabled the Ukrainian State, to organize a national Ukrainian Government, and a national Ukrainian Army. An unrivalled expert in the psychology of nations, he knew that no future failure, no opposing effort, could ever erase this fact.

The opposition which Pilsudski's Eastern policy met with here and there, arose from ignorance of the essential sources of Russian power. Russia, having guaranteed her Eastern frontiers through long centuries, had grown in the West by no means in proportion to her civilizing power. This was possible only owing to the fact that she met with merely passive nations, the governments of which were either too weak or else entirely non-existent, and whose culture was also on a low level. Her advance in the West was resisted first at the very threshold of ethnographic Poland, together with Polonized Lithuania. Here Russia was aided by the strength of her masses, and also by the joint action of Germany and Austria, with the tacit consent of the rest of Europe.

There existed, however, a second and no less important cause for the opening of new Russian horizons in the West, that is to say, that the nearest nations, for which her hand was outstretched, were also Slavonic nations, as she herself is, and at the same time smaller, with their existence constantly threatened by non-Slavonic elements.

This is not all. Russia containing such immense territories, a priceless treasury of all kinds of wealth and of all possible chances of individual enrichment, formed a magnet for the parasitic class, and for parasitic units.

Here was the cause of the dreams of the Russian Panslavists, that "all Slavonic rivers should flow into a Russian sea".

The recent war together with the Bolshevik Revolution proved however, that Russia was a country without a ruler. After the abolition of Tsardom, Russia was left to the mercy of a handful of individuals, desirous of introducing their own personal aims, and to the mercy also of elements who have reduced her to a condition of prehistoric tribes. In order to reorganize such a colossus, such an already complicated machine, Lenin and Trotzky are evidently insufficient although aided by the Generals of the Tsars. For this reason the pressure of the present rulers of Russia towards a joint frontier with Germany across Poland, and towards a stable common action, and common direction of Russia and Germany, is only too clear and comprehensible.

But the results of this partnership will ultimately decide not only the fate of Poland but that of the remaining Slavonic nations. The history of the world has advanced with long strides owing to the Universal War. Today it is confronted by the alternative — either to carry through to the end the process of the emancipation of the subjugated nations into national states, which in time would lead to their free federation

on the model of independent cooperative societies, or, relatively, to the concentration of the capitals of a large industry, arriving after a short period of contending struggle, at the creation of a monstrous trust, of the most powerful State organism, which would gradually swallow up the remainder of the lesser national states, and the exuberant wealthy lives of their inhabitants.

The man, who in this titanic struggle as Chief of the Polish State, stands with his powerful will on the side of the nations and national freedom, is the modern Knight "sans peur et sans reproche" — PILSUDSKI.

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